

Western Europe welcomes call to join Strategic Defense program

by George Gregory

Two years after President Reagan first outlined the Strategic Defense Initiative, Western Europe has officially welcomed the U.S. program to develop beam weapons that would shoot down Soviet nuclear missiles in flight. The final communiqué of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group in Luxembourg March 26-27, signed by the NATO defense ministers, reads, "We have continued the comprehensive consultations on the political and strategic implications of the United States Strategic Defense Initiative. We support the United States research program into these technologies, the aim of which is to enhance stability and deterrence at reduced levels of offensive nuclear forces. . . . We welcome the United States' invitation for Allies to consider participation in the research program."

U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger handed each of his West European colleagues at the meeting in Luxembourg a letter inviting them to participate in the SDI, through innovation of concepts and via commercial contracts to develop the new technologies. The same letter was sent to the governments of France, Japan, Israel, and Australia.

The Weinberger letter noted that work in the United States is going ahead not only on defensive weapons against ICBMs, but also against shorter-range nuclear missiles that target Western Europe; it requested that European governments inform the United States within 60 days in what specific ways each of them proposed to contribute to the SDI.

The official communiqué signed by the NATO governments reported, "We noted with concern the extensive and long-standing efforts in the strategic defense field by the Soviet Union which already deploys the world's only ABM and anti-satellite systems. The United States strategic defense research program is prudent in light of these Soviet activities and is also clearly influenced by the treaty violations reported by the President of the United States."

The communiqué also noted that the Soviets have fielded a total of 414 SS-20 mobile intermediate-range missiles targeted on Europe, with three warheads each. It observed that the Soviet Union, while talking in Geneva, "continues to update and improve its shorter-range nuclear forces." Within overall NATO planning, the phase-out of 1400 tactical nu-

clear weapons from Western Europe being planned under NATO Supreme Commander Gen. Bernard Rogers stands out in sharp contrast to the Soviet policy.

West German Chancellor Kohl, who had expressed a commitment to the SDI in February, indicated that he would not make a final decision before meeting with President Reagan on May 2. "Basically, approval of the SDI program has been given," said a Christian Democratic deputy in Bonn, and "we will certainly decide on participation within the next few weeks." Rejecting the SDI would be a serious mistake, warned Karl Feldmeyer, military editor of the German liberal daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, who pointed out that "governments have to decide now."

Tremendous pressure is being applied by the Soviet KGB to reverse Chancellor Kohl's positive stand, particularly from the pro-Soviet appeasers who are the West German Social Democracy's "defense experts." But the chief of the West German Defense Ministry Planning Staff, Hans Ruehle, broke the ice about what is happening in a number of European NATO countries (see *documentation*).

The 60-day deadline for a response to the U.S. invitation to participate is a "welcome relief" for European governments, according to sources, because the Soviets, in an effort to split Europe from the U.S.A., are expected to offer big "arms control" reductions in SS-20s and other nuclear systems targeted on Western Europe in exchange for a U.S. agreement to drop SDI research. By making the invitation to participate in SDI concrete, with a deadline, the United States has given European governments a choice in line with the U.S. Geneva negotiating position.

After the NPG meeting, where he reportedly delivered a thick package of documents on the SDI to the West German Defense Minister Manfred Wörner, Weinberger left for discussions with French Defense Minister Charles Hernu. After months in which the French government had appeared cool to the SDI, Hernu said, "The Russians are working on an equivalent project, and we must show that we are also able to participate, even in summary fashion, in 'Star Wars,' if we want to remain credible." Japan has likewise responded that it welcomes and is studying the invitation.

Documentation

The Nuclear Planning Group meeting closed on March 27 with a press conference with Caspar Weinberger and NATO Secretary-General Carrington. Lord Carrington, who had been conducting open sabotage against the Strategic Defense Initiative since 1983, is now doing everything to sound like a fervent booster of the American program. What follows is our correspondent's report.

Carrington opened the press conference with a statement on behalf of the NPG, saying the group formally "condemns the killing of [U.S.]

Soviet military a "clearly unjustified act of violence."

He said that the NPG heard a briefing on progress in the SDI program by Weinberger and discussed the implications for Allied strategy. What came across "very clearly is that the Americans are embarked on a research program which everyone thinks is the right thing to be doing. . . ." This was justified because of the Soviet Union's own research program. The "Americans welcome European participation" and have assured the Europeans that the "results and implications of the research will be thoroughly discussed with the Allies."

Carrington said that discussions "showed that there was unanimous support for a research program on SDI of the United States"; other questions and disagreements could arise in the future but it is too early to speculate. The Nuclear Planning Group, which meets every six months, would be the proper place to discuss this question.

Secretary Weinberger said, "We were completely satisfied with the result because the things we are doing were endorsed and supported unanimously."

Asked about restrictions in the technology and information-sharing in SDI cooperation, Secretary Weinberger replied that "restrictions were not discussed at all as far as I recall." "What we want is to have the technologies developed and we welcome the participation of countries that wish to do so in developing those technologies. We . . . issued a very formal invitation to participate and we hope there will be strong cooperation . . . in developing this very important technology."

A reporter asked whether the SDI can cover Europe, what is its impact on nuclear deterrence, and whether the SDI will be negotiable. Weinberger said: "I think the principal question you mentioned was the first, whether or not the SDI is proven to be feasible to destroy both intermediate-range and intercontinental missiles, the answer as far as we know is yes. . . ."

Have tactical defensive systems been discussed? Weinberger: "I don't think there is any suggestion that it would be

used against tactical weapons. We are developing and hope to develop means that are effective against all tactical battlefield weapons. But the SDI is designed to destroy, by non-nuclear means, Soviet missiles outside the atmosphere before they get anywhere near their targets."

An *Asahi Shimbun* journalist asked whether the offer to Japan might violate Japan's constitution. Weinberger commented, "I had the strong impression that [the Japanese] would be disappointed if they were not invited to participate. They are being invited to participate in the development of the scientific research, technological research into the question as to whether a strategic defense of the kind we are talking about is feasible. But if they feel they would rather not participate, their decision would be well understood. We would welcome the technological and scientific skills of Japan."

EIR asked whether SDI would be used as a bargaining chip if it proved feasible. Weinberger answered, "This is not the position of the United States government, no. What we are embarked on is a research program. The President has said several times that this is a research program and you can't bargain away that, and it is my understanding that Mr. Gromyko agrees with that statement. . . ."

Did Weinberger expect the NATO countries to respond as a group to the deadline of 60 days? The U.S. defense chief replied, "We would be delighted with any form of positive response. The 60 days incidentally is not all that rigid. . . . We want to have the participation of very talented and capable people in this program. . . ."

Chief of the West German Defense Ministry Planning Staff Hans Ruehle gave an ad hoc, unannounced briefing during the NPG meeting in Luxembourg, on the "working paper" of the Planning Staff on the technology areas mapped out for "possible cooperation with the SDI":

Ruehle stated the paper exists "in only one copy . . . mine," and was worked out in collaboration with 30 German industries and research institutions. Materials technology, signal processing, sensor technology, components of space research, and sub-systems for ultra-high acceleration missiles were named as five areas in which West Germany is either leading or advanced enough to cooperate. The United States should now stipulate performance parameters, so that German industry can decide and evaluate whether they can and want to meet those specifications. The paper will be a "subject of consultation" in the Federal Security Council, he said.

He also said that the Planning Staff was working to try to get an overview of "possible spinoffs of benefit to industry outside of the military area. . . . This will be a very difficult task, but we have to try to do it." He stressed that "no decision has been taken on cooperation, and this paper does not contain any reference to that. It is merely pre-work done by my staff."